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Sub-Commission on Prevention of
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Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 10

THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF DETAINEES

Written statement submitted by International Educational Development, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[16 August 1995]

1. International Education Development/Humanitarian Law Project (IED/HLP) present to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities information provided by the Medical Centre for Human Rights, Zagreb, Croatia, concerning missing people captured on 18 November 1991 in Vukovar hospital, after the fall of the city. Now they are regarded as missing, because the Government [of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] does not recognize them as detained in Serbian camps. IED/HLP wishes to bring this problem to the attention of the international community.

2. Because of renewed requests for tracing abducted, detained and missing persons, the Commission for Detained and Missing Persons of the Government of the Republic of Croatia reopened its investigations and established that the total number of abducted, detained and missing persons in the Republic of Croatia is 2,862. According to this precise evidence, 53 per cent of all abducted, detained and missing persons are civilians, while 47 per cent are Croatian defenders (military). The number of renewed requests is lower than the number of requests registered in 1993 by the Office for the Victims of War (7,827 missing persons) and significantly lower than the number of requests

for tracing of abducted, detained and missing persons registered in the database of the Croatian Red Cross in the period 1991-1993 (13,000 missing persons). This can be explained by the fact that the majority of families learned, in different ways, the fate of persons for whom they had submitted requests for tracing of missing persons in the period 1991-1992, and some of those persons had been released through an exchange.

3. As part of the action for the collection of detailed information for tracing missing persons, additional data and dossiers are assembled with details of all known circumstances of disappearances, witnesses' testimonies and medical documentation needed for further tracing.

4. On 19 June 1995, at 8 a.m., on the square of Saint Marko in Zagreb, parents and wives of persons who have disappeared in the war started a hunger strike. With this hunger strike they want to influence international public opinion to find out the truth about the missing members of their families. According to official data, 2,862 persons have disappeared. From the hospital in Vukovar alone, 166 wounded persons, 43 staff members and 57 civilians were taken away by the former Yugoslav National Army. For almost four years, nothing has been known of their fate.

5. IED/HLP attaches to this statement the following appeal by the women of Vukovar.

> "We appeal to you in the name of the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of 2,862 missing Vukovar civilians and defenders who were taken away after the fall of the Croatian city of Vukovar on 18 November 1991.
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> "Since that day we have known nothing about the fate of our beloved. It has been almost four years, filled with uncertainty, doubt and despair. Each new day brings growing helplessness and despondency, which grows even greater because of numerous doubts and unofficial news that they are alive.
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> "The released Vukovar prisoners, who were registered by the Serbian military authorities at the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross told us that our men are alive, but detained in secret concentration camps in the Vukovar region (Dalj, Bobota, Grabovo, Ovcara, Jakobovac, and many others), as well as in some Serbian prisons (Valjevo, Aleksinacki midnik, Bubanj Potok). The wounded, civilians and defenders taken in an unknown direction after the fall of Vukovar are registered officially as "missing". The International Committee of the Red Cross cannot find the way to our men, which makes us even more desperate because UNPROFOR are settled in the region of Eastern Slavonia and we hoped they would provide the entry to all the prisons to an international humanitarian organization.
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> "We are afraid that each day brings worse sufferings for our men and brings them closer to a martyr's death, because the conditions in those concentration camps (some of them are private) as well as the treatment they get from the Serbs who are keeping them detained, are beneath any limit of humaneness.

"The authorities in Geneva told us that each step we make in our attempt to find and rescue our men is one centimetre forward. We kindly ask, we beg you to contribute with your authority and influence to the salvation of 2,862 people together with their families whose lives in these 1,360 days of expectance and uncertainty have turned into the hell of despair and senselessness.

"Our wish is to make our Vukovar a living and civilized city again. Vukovar, now a ruin, cannot be rebuilt only with bricks, steel and glass. It can become a city again only by implanting in it our hearts, love and will for life, which can be brought back to us only by our men who are still detained, and whose fate is still uncertain.

"We plead with you to contribute to the victory of life, humanity, truth and justice over the dark forces of evil, death and lies, making the Serbian authorities recognize the existence of the secret concentration camps and making it possible to visit and save the suffering people who were so brutally taken away from us.

"All our hopes and faith are directed to you."

Women of Vukovar.